

Date: June 13, 2007

To: Chairman Paul Condino  
and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Linda Burnett

Subject: SB 386

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of proposed amendments to the Michigan Child Welfare Law Section 520.

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I believe there is a serious omission in Section 520. The law currently states that a person working in Michigan's schools is guilty of sexual misconduct in the fourth degree only if that person is a teacher, substitute teacher, or administrator in the school. I am requesting your support in amending this law to include ANY person working with students in a public or nonpublic school, particularly if that person is in a position of authority. This omission became very personal to me when an investigation revealed that my 17 year old daughter was having an 'inappropriate' relationship with the recently hired, newly married, 28 year old police liaison officer at Woodhaven High School. My daughter developed a teenage crush on this officer. Instead of distancing himself from her and following his oath to 'serve and protect', he pursued her within the school setting and used his position to take advantage of an inexperienced 17 year old girl who trusted him.

This officer pursued the liaison position and was transferred to the high school in September, 2006. By the beginning of October, he was arranging inappropriate after-school meetings with my daughter.

Previously, my daughter was a carefree 17 year old making the most of her senior year. She was doing very well academically, was in line to qualify for community scholarships, enjoyed working on the school newspaper and yearbook, had been elected Spirit Queen during homecoming week, and was looking forward to all of the culminating activities of her senior year – spending these final months with friends, the final SnoBall dance, prom, senior all night party, senior breakfast, and commencements. All of these lifetime memories have been damaged by the failure of this officer to honor his oath of office. He placed his personal gratification ahead of my daughter's welfare.

My daughter has been unable to return to the high school due to the embarrassment and ridicule she has suffered as the result of this devastating situation. Since December, she has depended on homebound teaching services and correspondence courses to complete requirements for her high school diploma. She has recuperated from an automobile accident that resulted from the stress of this incident when she blacked out, hit a telephone pole, and totaled the

truck she had received for her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. She has had to endure threats and harassment from the family and friends of this officer. Physician's visits to rule out sexually transmitted diseases are ongoing. To complicate matters, my daughter does not yet fully realize she has been victimized, making it difficult to seek the mental health assistance that she needs. A little too much for a 17 year old to have to deal with during what should be one of the best years of her life.

In addition to the short-term consequences, research indicates my daughter may now be predisposed to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, a larger number of sexual partners, and a greater tendency to be sexually victimized later in life as the result of this officer's actions.

We expect the paid professionals in a school setting to exercise mature judgment, knowing the serious consequences that result for the student when sexual predators abuse their authority. Unfortunately, due to an omission in Michigan's law and because my daughter is 17 years old, this man will face no criminal charges for the devastation he has caused my daughter and our family.

We have had to satisfy ourselves with the fact that he was terminated from his position with the Brownstown Police Department. However, we have information that he is now employed as a police officer in a neighboring community where he might once again take advantage of his position of trust. If the proposed amendments to this law were in effect when my daughter became his victim, this man would be labeled a 'sex offender' and would no longer be permitted the opportunity to prey on other vulnerable girls.

Again, I am requesting your support in amending MCL520 to include any person working with students in a public or nonpublic school in the state of Michigan, especially if that person is in a position of authority and trust.

Thank you for your consideration.



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## Remorseful school liaison is fired

*By Jackie Harrison-Martin, The News-Herald*

PUBLISHED: December 17, 2006

**BROWNSTOWN TWP.** — A 28-year-old officer was terminated from the Police Department after rumors of an inappropriate relationship with a 17-year-old Woodhaven High School student were substantiated.

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Officer Christian Zieminski was given written notification of his termination Wednesday afternoon.

The six-year veteran was serving as a school liaison officer at Woodhaven High School. He was assigned to Woodhaven in September. He also was married that month.

Police believe Zieminski had inappropriate contact with the student on two occasions at about the end of October.

Rumors of the relationship with the student were brought to the attention of Zieminski's supervisor, and several students and staff members were interviewed by police.

According to police, the student told her

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friends about her encounters with the officer.

At this point, Police Chief Daniel Grant said Zieminski has several options.

"He has the right to not contest the termination or he can file a grievance with his union," the chief said. "He has 30 days to file a grievance. It will be brought to me and I'll give an answer in writing."

If Grant denies the grievance, it can be appealed to the human resources director, who can uphold Grant's decision or recommend a lesser punishment.

The township Board of Trustees has the right to override both decisions.


Grant said he has only had to deal with a few terminations and they are very difficult and disappointing situations.

"He (Zieminski) was very apologetic," Grant said. "He shook our hands and said he was very sorry. He was very remorseful in this incident."

The chief said he has met with the student's parents and said they were made aware of the department's intentions to terminate Zieminski. They were kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

Grant said he met with two members of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and a captain of the Michigan State Police concerning possible charges. Both said no charges would be filed because of the student's age and because the actions were consensual.

The age of sexual consent in Michigan is 16.

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The contact with the student was in direct violation of the department's code of conduct and ethics, according to Grant.

Although the meetings took place while the officer was off duty and off school property, Grant said police officers are governed by a code of ethics whether on duty or off.

Officer Corey Wilson, a four-year member of the force, has been assigned as the new liaison officer.